



SPEECH

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Welcome Address by Commander COSCOM, Colonel Kevin Santa- Maria, at the Opening Ceremony of the 1st Western Pacific Mine Countermeasure Exercise and the 1st Western Pacific Diving Exercise Held on Tuesday, 12 June 2001 at 1520 hrs at Tuas Naval Base

12 Jun 2001

Minister of State for Defence, Chief of Navy, senior officers, distinguished Guests, and exercise participants.

Good afternoon and welcome to the opening ceremony of the 1st Western Pacific Mine Countermeasure Exercise and the 1st Western Pacific Diving Exercise 2001.

It is indeed a great honour for me to deliver this welcome address for such an occasion as both these exercises are very significant events for regional naval co-operation. Over the next two weeks, we will have 16 member navies of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium with some fifteen ships and about 1500 personnel participating in these two exercises. This is the first WPNS exercise conducted at sea and it is the largest exercise in terms of participating navies ever conducted in this region. While it is indeed an honour for the RSN to host these two exercises, it is more significant that despite the busy operational and training schedules, so many of our fellow members of the WPNS have supported these two exercises by sending ships, dive teams and personnel. This level of participation is a clear indication of our combined commitment to regional naval co-operation.

The idea of having such an exercise was first mooted by the RAN in 1999 during the 1st International MCM Seminar hosted by the RAN. The RSN agreed to host this exercise as we saw it as an excellent initiative for regional naval co-operation. Being strategically located in the region, we felt that it would also be easier for navies to send their ships and people to Singapore for these exercises. However we also realised that there were many challenges in organising such a multilateral exercise. These included allocating suitable exercise areas, accommodating the training objectives of the various navies, the safety considerations, the different operating procedures, medical evacuation and other contingencies and the intricate policy considerations which is always a reality for such multilateral exercises.

This exercise took about six months to plan. We started in Dec 2000 with the Initial Planning Conference, had the Main Planning Conference in March 2001 and the Final Planning Conference in May 2001, which coincided with IMDEX ASIA 2001. We are here today because of the hard work and contributions by all the representatives of the participating navies during those planning conferences. If I was asked what was the main factor that contributed to materialisation of these two exercises, I would say it was the ability of the participants to co-operate with one another and put aside their own preferences so that these exercises could take place. Many compromises were made and a give and take attitude was always prevalent. I have said this before and I would say it again: Thank you for making my job a whole lot easier. Our ability as WPNS navies to put this exercise together is a clear indication of the spirit of naval co-operation and its vast potential that will benefit everyone.

At this point on the commitment to naval co-operation, I would like to thank the Indonesian Navy and Rear Admiral Si Putu Ardana, the Commander-in-Chief of the Western Fleet, for allowing us to use some parts of the Indonesian Waters in the South China Sea for the exercise. As you know we have fifteen ships participating in the MCM Exercise and we did not have enough space in the Singapore Straits to accommodate all the ships. The RSN had approached the Indonesian Navy and they very kindly consented to the use of certain areas of their waters that were suitable for littoral MCM operations. The Indonesian Navy had also made available their emergency evacuation capabilities and their hospital on Bintan Island for the exercise. I would again like to thank the Indonesian Navy for their significant support for this exercise.

We have a very interesting eleven days ahead of us. There will be presentations, demonstrations and discussions on diving, MCM and medical procedures. The ships will be going out to sea on the 14 and 15 of June and again from the 18 to 20 of June. The divers will be at the Naval Diving unit and then will do diving on one of the off-shore islands on 14 and 15 June. The divers have also taken the effort to organise some sports for some professional bonding. I hope they don't maim each other in the process. I also hope we still have an island left after the divers have completed their exercises.

In the operations orders of the two exercises, we had stated the goals of WPNS MCM Co-operation. They were to establish good relationships between navies of the WPNS, to build and foster mutual co-operation with a view towards interoperability and to explore opportunities for co-operation in the humanitarian MCM effort. These goals were crafted by the representatives of the WPNS navies at the last MCM seminar.

I believe that these two exercises provide us with the opportunities to achieve all these goals. It will be up to us the participants to be open with one another and learn as much as we can from each other. I also hope new and lasting friendships between fellow professionals will be made. From the very positive attitude we have seen from the navies in the planning conferences, I am sure we will achieve all these goals. I am sure we will find these exercises very professionally beneficial.

We hope all the participants will find our arrangements and support facilities adequate and if there is anything else that you need please let me or my exercise staff know. We hope that all the

exercise participants also find the time to see Singapore. For many of you this is not your first time to Singapore and for those who are here for the first time, we hope it will be a great experience. I think in planning these exercises we allocated a fair amount of time for R and R. So please enjoy yourselves in Singapore.

It leaves me to conclude by once again thanking you all for being here and taking part in the exercise. We are all part of this significant event. On behalf of the RSN, I would also like to thank Mr David Lim, the Minister of State for Defence and Information and the Arts to have taken the time to be the Guest of Honour for this event. The Minister was also the Guest of Honour for the Opening Ceremony of the 2nd International MCM Seminar held in November 2000. It was from that seminar that concrete plans and commitments were made for this exercise. So we are glad to have him here once again to address us.

It leaves me to just say: Let's have a good exercise.

Thank You.

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